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## SOCIAL AWARENESS, NETWORKING, INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCE AND INTRINSIC CAREER SUCCESS

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### Abstract

#### Abstract

*Leaders' political skill still actively been study in management area, but not much research done to investigate in education management context. Thus, this study investigated the influence of Leaders' political skill on intrinsic career success in the context of public secondary school organizations. Specifically, this research investigated the degree to which three sets of predictor's variables: leader's social awareness, networking, and interpersonal skill that influence career success of school principals. This study involves a quantitative analysis of school principals' self-perception of their political skill, and intrinsic career success. The data was obtained through mail survey method from school principals. The response rate for the sample was 53 percent, resulting in a usable sample size of 312 participants. The data was analyzed by using regression analyses. The findings of this study showed that Leader political skills in term of networking, interpersonal skill were positively and significantly influence intrinsic career success. Overall, the findings of this study shows not strong evidence to support that leader's political skill has a strong influence on the career success of school principals. This study finding has contributed to current knowledge and understanding of career success from political perspective. The results thus serve to improve organizational career planning management and can help individuals to manage their career. Finally, this article discusses the implications of the study to theory and recommendations for future research*

**Keywords:** Career satisfaction, career success, social astuteness, networking, interpersonal skill

### INTRODUCTION

Political skill is considered to be one of the most important social competencies which is reflected through cognitive, affective and behavioral manifestations, and has implications for both individual and group. This skill have been shown have some significant impact to career development of leaders. Leaders' political skill still actively been study in management area. Although extensive academic research has explored the relationship between political skill and career success (Usman & Anwar-ul-haq, 2016), much less research has investigated in educational context. There is the need for research that extends beyond the business organization. It is increasingly evident that political skill will continue to be a critical component of career development in organization. Although many academic researchers have acknowledged a need for greater understanding in this area (Blickle, John, Ferris, Momm, Oerder, 2012; Syed & Khan, 2015; Perrewé & Ferris, 2016), little is known about how political dimensions affect career satisfaction. In order to be effective in political environments, Pfeffer (1981) and Mintzberg (1983,1985) suggested to study leaders from political perspectives and they point out that leaders needed to possess political skill. In this study political skill was identified on the basis of three dimensions which are social astuteness, interpersonal influence, and network ability.

To further the understanding, this study explored school leaders' career development to identify sources of satisfaction from political perspective. The research questions driving this study are as follows:

- How are political skill dimension related to career success?

The rest of the article is structured as follows: First, the extant literature on career success, political skill dimensions are reviewed. This is followed by a description of the research methods and procedures used in the study. The results of research are then discussed. Finally, implications, limitations, and directions for future research are offered.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Theoretical Underpinning of the Research**

The political theory of leadership could be used as a theoretical basis for studying career success from a political perspective. Ammeter, Douglas, Gardner, Hochwarter, & Ferris (2002), proposed a political theory of leadership, which specifies that leader antecedents (e.g. mental ability, personality, social capital, cognition, political will, and personality) would affect the political behaviour utilized by a leader. Furthermore, Leader antecedents and leader Political behaviour will affect the important individual-level outcomes of the leader (e.g. leader effectiveness, performance evaluation, promotion, and, reputation). Specifically, a leaders' political behaviour will increase his or her organizational power, increase his or her interpersonal reputation, and earn him or her greater organizational rewards. According to this theory, leader outcome also influenced by target outcome (e.g. affective, cognitive, attitude and performance). This theory also proposed that organizational context would influence the leader antecedents and leader political behaviour. Based on the theory, it is proposed that personality, social capital (political skill), and behavior of leaders will influence their career success (promotion, mobility, compensation).

### **Leader Career Success**

A large and growing body of management literature has investigated in the area of career success since several decades ago. The question why some people are more successful in their careers than others is among the prevalent and interesting issues in this previous research. Comprehensive models of career success have been proposed in the literature. A consideration amount of literature have investigated the determinants of career success and have revealed that different factors influence career success within an organization (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005). In brief, most researchers have conceptualized career success to comprise extrinsic (objective) and intrinsic (subjective) career success. Some researchers assessed objective career success by extrinsic outcomes such as job title, annual income, or promotion rate (Gunz, & Heslin, 2005). Other researchers paid attention to the subjective perspectives of career success such as one's own beliefs, interests, and values about career and life (Ng & Feldman, 2014). Objective and subjective career success are conceptually distinct, and they have different determinants (Dries, Pepermans, & Carlier, 2008).

Intrinsic career success has been defined as an individual's subjective feelings or internal evaluation of accomplishment and the personal satisfaction an individual derives from his or her career (Ng & Feldman, 2014). This personal satisfaction is based partially on objective indicators. Based on this definition, one's subjective indicator of career success is measured by the individual's self-report of career satisfaction. A person's own perspective of career satisfaction is important in career research because people who have achieved much in their objective career success in an organization may not actually feel successful or proud of their achievement. This study will conceptualize intrinsic or subjective career success (feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction with one's career) as career satisfaction.

Career satisfaction is one of the constructs that was measured as subjective career success in previous research. It measures the extent to which individuals believe their career progress is consistent with their own goals, values, and preferences. Whereas job satisfaction indicates a satisfaction with the current position of employment, career satisfaction refers to a broader satisfaction with one's career outcome.

### **Leader Political skill.**

A lot of studies have examined political skill in organizations. Mintberg (1983; 1985) noted that individuals needed to possess political skill characteristics to be effective and successful in organizations. Political skill demonstrated has relationship with career outcomes (Todd, Harris, Harris, & Wheeler, 2009; Blickle, Oerder, & Summers, 2010; Shakti & Srivastava, 2004). The research findings also show that leaders who possess a moderate amount of political skill experience less job tension and greater job satisfaction. Some studies showed the significant moderating effects of political skill on predictors of career success (Brouer, Duke, Treadway, & Ferris, 2009; Brouer, Harris, & Kacmar, 2011). Previous study also shows that employees who are able to build effective networks, influence others interpersonally, appear sincere in their approaches, and excel in social astuteness are more satisfied in their careers and in life than are those who are less politically skilled (Ferris, Treadway, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, Kacmar, Douglas, & Frink, 2005). It have been proved that employees who were high in political skill were better performers when engaging in influence tactics compared to those who were low in political skill (Bing, Davison, Minor, Novicevic, & Frink, 2011; Treadway, Shaughnessy, Breland, Yang, & Reeves, 2013) and improve career outcomes more effectively (Treadway, Ferris, Duke, Adams & Thatcher, 2007). Individuals who are high in political skills perceive themselves as being more successful in their career (Breland, Treadway, Duke & Adams, 2007). The political skill would influences income, hierarchical position, career satisfaction , total promotions, career satisfaction, life satisfaction, and job mobility (Bing, vison, Minor, Novicevic, & Frink, 2011). Ferris et al. (2007: 310) asserted that political skill is the main construct in order to establish vision, determine team climate and promote team-member interactions. Political skill was asserted to increase subordinates' trust and sup-port, leaders' competence and authenticity, members' job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behavior and to decrease in turnover in- tent (Ahearn et al., 2004; Ammeter et al., 2002; Douglas & Ammeter, 2005); Treadway et al., 2013).

In a study conducted by Ahearn et al. (2004), leader political skill was found to be a fundamental predictor of team performance. Ahearn et al., (2004: 324-325) argued that politically skilled leaders were found confident, honest and supportive managers; hence, their interactions with team members facilitate increment of team performance. Treadway et al. (2004) examined the relationship between leader political skill and employee reactions. They found that leader political skill had a positive effect on the perceived organizational support; in- creased job satisfaction and organizational trust, while decreasing organizational cynicism. They argued that as a result of all these inter- actions employees' organizational commitment would be higher in organizations managed by politically skilled leaders. The findings obtained from the study validated all hypotheses and indicated that political skill affected employee reactions. In summary, previous research studies have shown that political skill is associated to the career success of an individual.

Ferris et al (2005) proposed four political skill practices as social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity. Campbell and Phillip (2013) adapted and changed social astuteness to social awareness, networking ability to networking, and apparent sincerity to sincerity. However, this study only used three dimensions of political skill, Social Awareness, Interpersonal Influence and Networking. Social Awareness is a leader's ability to astutely observe others to understand their

behaviors and motives. While, Interpersonal Influence is a leader's ability to influence and engage others using a compelling and charismatic interpersonal style and Networking skill is a leader's ability to build diverse relationship networks across and outside of the organization

Based on theory and literature review discussed, it is proposed that:

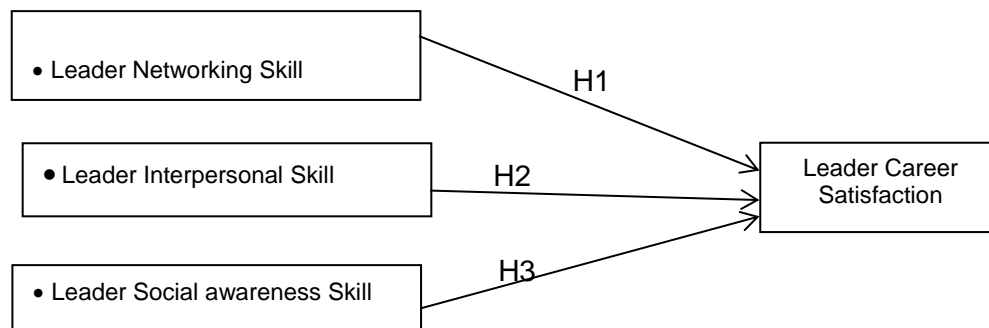
*H1: Leaders Networking Skill contributes to a school principal's career satisfaction*

*H2: Leaders Interpersonal influence Skill contributes to a school principal's career satisfaction*

*H3: Leaders Social Awareness Skill contributes to a school principal's career satisfaction*

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on literature review and political leadership theory, a model is developed. The research model is shown in Figure 1. The model consists of three key leader political skill components as independent variable. All three individual of political skill components are expected to influence school principal's career satisfaction.



### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Sampling Design

The population for this study consisted of school principals who serve in public secondary schools in Malaysia. The unit of analysis was the school principals. The sampling frame was a list of all school principals in Malaysia. The researcher first identifies the stratum according to state and their actual representation in the population. Random sampling is then used to select subjects from each stratum until the number of subjects in that stratum is proportional to its frequency in the population. The sample size for a population of 2,035 people is a minimum of 322 respondents. The sample respondents are representative of the population. The respondents were leaders of a school organization who were referred to as school principals throughout this study. The questionnaire was self-administered and required no direct intervention. The mail questionnaire method was used in this study.

#### Measures

The main measures were intrinsic career success and political skill. A 5-point Likert skill scoring format was used to measure all skill with strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (5) as the end points

*Intrinsic career success.* Intrinsic career success was assessed using the Career Satisfaction Scale (CSS). CSS adapted from Greenhouse et al. (1990). Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.81. This scale taps a person's overall satisfaction with their career. This scale has been regarded as one of the mostly used measures in subjective career success. The measure was developed to measure satisfaction with career and the extent to which an employee has made satisfactory progress towards goals for income level, advancement, and development skill.

*Political Skill.* The perceived levels of political skill dimensions of social astuteness, networking, interpersonal skill in this study was measured using Political Skill Inventory (PSI) from a modified version of Ferris, Treadway, et al. (2005). The reliabilities for each of the subscales of political skill ranged from 0.73 to 0.87 (Ferris, Treadway, et al., 2005)

### DATA ANALYSIS

The obtained data were analyzed using suitable statistics to analyze the relationship of leaders' political skill and career success. **Table 1** presents the means, standard deviations, correlations, and internal consistency reliability estimates of the study variables. The means for interpersonal skill is (M = 16.68, SD = 2.00), social awareness skill (M = 11.38, SD = 1.71), networking skill (M = 10.37, SD = 2.26), and career satisfaction (M = 19.05, SD = 3.61). Statistically significant correlations are found between the political skill dimensions, interpersonal skill, social awareness skill and networking skill. In addition that three political skill dimensions scales interpersonal skill, social awareness skill and networking skill significantly correlate with career satisfaction.

**Table 1: Means, Standard deviations, Correlations, and Reliabilities for main variables of interest in the study**

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.age	51.43	2.981	1.000						
2.gender	1.44	.497	.083	1.000					
3.experience	4.60	3.840	.291	-.126	1.000				
4.career satisfaction	19.05	3.61	.094*	-.112*	.099*	1.000			
5.interpersonal skill	16.68	2.00	-.052	-.025	.053	.253**	1.000		
6.social awareness skill	11.38	1.71	-.054	-.054	.142	.221**	.501**	1.000	
7.networking skill	10.37	2.26	-.094	-.094	.075	.214**	.436**	.384**	1.000

Note. N=312; Control variables are age, gender, present experience and total experience; for \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Age, gender, and total experience in career was controlled in present study. Multiple linear regression analysis is conducted to test hypothesis 1, 2 and 3 which contend the direct effects of the political skills on career satisfaction. **Table 2** depicts the results for regression. As predicted interpersonal skill is significantly positively related to career satisfaction, ( $\beta = .17$ ,  $p < .05$ ) thus confirming hypothesis 2. Moreover, networking skill is significantly positively related to career satisfaction ( $\beta = .11$ ,  $p < .10$ ) providing full support for hypothesis 1 as well. Finally, social awareness skill is not significantly related to career satisfaction ( $\beta = -.08$ ,  $p = .ns$ ), thus not support for hypothesis 3. Looking at the predictive power of political skill with the career outcome variable, the model as a whole explained 8 % of the variance:  $F(3,304) = 9.17$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). This indicates that the variables of interest accounted for a small proportion of the variance in the career satisfaction.

**Table 2: Regression results for direct relationship between Political Skills and career Outcomes**

	career satisfaction			
	B	R	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>				
age	.09			
gender	.11			
experience	.06			
		.16	.03	
<b>Step2</b>				
networking skill	.11 <sup>†</sup>			
interpersonal skill	.17 <sup>*</sup>			
social awareness skill	.08			
		.33	.11	.08

Note: N=311; Age, Gender, Present Experience and Total Experience were controlled. \*\*\* $P < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , <sup>†</sup> $p < .10$

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study was designed to examine the influence of leader political skill on intrinsic career success. This study hypothesized and test the argument that employees high in political skill dimensions are more apt to reflect high degree of career satisfaction as indicator of career success. The results provide partial support to existing literature on political skill and career outcomes. This research contributes to career study by demonstrating of using political approach in analyze the factors that influence career success. This study has strengths. This research challenged the negative perspective of politics and replaced by more positive perspective, where by individuals need social competencies and skill to be successful in political environments organization. This study offer unique insights on relationship of political skill by characterizing its trait characteristics in which will result in increase in career satisfaction.

### Summary of findings

Political skill has long been identified as a management competency to be effective in organizations and will influence work outcomes (Mintzberg, 1983). In addition, Mintzberg in 1985 proposed that career success in organizations is determined more by social skill and political skill. Therefore, one of the ways to make progress in a career development is to build social and political competence. Individuals with a high political skill have the ability to understand effectively the work of others, have very good networking and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and organizational objectives (Ferris et al., 2000). It has been argued that political skill is vital for superior performers (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Thus, this study have proved the significant effect of political skill on intrinsic career success of leaders.

In sum, the results of this study show that the political skill dimensions, partially have an impact on intrinsic career success dimension for career satisfaction. This study revealed that political skill factors, namely interpersonal skill and networking skill significantly related to intrinsic career success. Individuals who are more interpersonal and networking skill are likely to be more satisfied in their careers. Individuals who are able to build effective networks are likely to be more satisfied in their career. Individuals who excel in interpersonal skill are likely to be satisfied in their careers. Thus, those who have political skill would be expected to be liked by others and are more satisfied with their career than are those who are less politically skilled. This finding provides the evidence that political skill is a predictor of intrinsic career success.

This study was consistent with the findings reported in Todd, Harris, Harris, and Wheeler (2009), Blickle, Oerder, and Summers (2010), Perrewé, and Ferris (2016). The previous study showed a significant positive correlation between political skill and career satisfaction. Past studies also showed that formal and informal networking had a strong association with career satisfaction among employees. In sum, this finding found that individuals who are high in political skill are able to influence others to achieve desired outcomes and goals in career. Leaders strive to develop and preserve meaningful social relationships are more likely to be satisfied with their careers. The results suggest that individuals who are highly politically skilled perceive themselves as more successful in their career.

## **Practical Implications**

The political skill has become important for the employees to survive in political environments. The managers can thus use it to increase organizational effectiveness of their employees as politically skilled individuals can develop resources more effectively, as well as can adopt themselves to different situations. Past research clearly showed that political skill in employees could be enhanced through proper training and coaching of employees (Ferris et al., 2008; Pfeffer, 2010). Thus managers should focus and develop different processes to increase political skill of their employees through interpersonal influence.

The findings of this study have several practical implications for the teaching profession in Malaysia. This study shows the link between the perception of political skills and the career success of school principals. Political skill is significantly correlated to intrinsic career success. Thus, school principals with high political skills are more satisfied with their career. To achieve intrinsic career success, the knowledge of political skill are important. The research findings show that political skill will enhance career satisfaction. Thus, current and future school principals need this information about political skill in order to maximize their career success. This result suggests that individuals may benefit from being able to participate in political skill training. One primary implication is the need of training on management skills such as political skill. Certainly, these are critical skills for all school principals to obtain more positive career outcomes.

At the organizations level, the results also suggest that, if organizations want their employees to achieve intrinsic career success, attention must be given to developing their skills. It suggests that employees who are higher in political skill experience a more positive career outcome in terms of career.

This finding is useful for the Ministry of Education's human resource and training divisions in their career management strategies.

### **Theoretical Contributions.**

The present study offers a number of theoretical contributions to the study of career development in organizations. This study contributes to the existing literature by supporting the theory that the individual attributes variable and political environment aspects influence career success. Most importantly, this is among the few studies of career success carried out from an organizational political perspective. Thus, the argument by Mintzberg (1983, 1985) that career success is determined less by intelligence (education, training, tenure) and hard work and more by networking, and political savvy was partially supported.

The political theory of leadership (Ammeter et al., 2002) specifies that interpersonal qualities (social capital, cognition, political will, and personality) affect the leader political behaviour utilized by a leader and affect important individual-level outcomes of the leader (leader effectiveness, performance evaluation, promotion, and reputation). According to this theory, the leaders' political will and social capital will affect career outcomes. Therefore, the theory of political leadership was supported by this study.

### **Limitations and directions for future research**

Current research also possesses few limitations. Firstly this study employed cross-sectional research designs to examine the proposed relationships. Moreover self-reported variables were incorporated. However since we tapped perceptions of political skills and work outcomes, therefore employees' response could accurately predict the proposed relations. Future researchers need to employ longitudinal research design and multi-source data to further validate our proposed model and research findings. Finally, future researchers should replicate the proposed research model in newer and developing countries context to validate the above findings in similar contexts. The generalizability of the finding is limited because this study was conducted in school organization only. The findings and the limitations of this study have led the researcher to make the following recommendations for further research. The concepts of career success should be broader than intrinsic aspects. This includes using the sociological perspective of career success (social status, reputation, and recognition). Future studies should employ methodological triangulation by using qualitative methods, involving participant observations, and using an in-depth interview method. These methods are a way to get in-depth and comprehensive information. Personal interviews might have different results when subjects are not likely to respond to survey methods.

### **Conclusion**

The regression analysis provided partial support for hypothesized model. Thus, overall the study provides unique insights how political skill contributes beneficially for developing positive outcomes and reducing negative attitudes at workplace. It also adds greatly to the theoretical as well as empirical research on political skill by testing these relationships in Malaysian culture which is a new setting to test such relationships. Political skill not much influenced on career success. In particular, interpersonal skill and networking skill were correlated positively and significantly with career satisfaction. However, this study found that social awareness is not a predictor of intrinsic career success. Furthermore, this research



provides groundwork for future research on career success in other occupations or career roles and extends the literature of school principals' studies. Altogether, these findings provided theoretical, practical, and research implications to the career development area in management literature.

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